

VZCZCXRO4784  
RR RUEHHM  
DE RUEHHI #1122 2740941  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 300941Z SEP 08  
FM AMEMBASSY HANOI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8551  
INFO RUEHHM/AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH 5172

UNCLAS HANOI 001122

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MLS, DRL/IRF

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KIRF](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [VM](#)

SUBJECT: CRA CHAIRMAN COMMENTS ON CATHOLIC LAND ISSUES AND  
REGISTRATION OF PROTESTANT GROUPS

¶1. (SBU) Summary: During the DCM's September 29 introductory call on Committee for Religious Affairs (CRA) Chairman Nguyen The Doanh, he asserted that the Hanoi People's Committee is taking the lead in responding to the Catholic land disputes, but warned that the Catholics should not stir up "social disorder." Doanh highlighted efforts to register Protestant congregations in northern Vietnam and to provide training on regulations governing registration to local officials; however, he conceded that Protestant registrations in the Northwest have been slower than in other areas. He affirmed the CRA's support for printing a Hmong Bible, describing current obstacles as a technical matter of recognizing a "new" Hmong script.  
End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Meeting with the DCM September 29, Committee for Religious Affairs (CRA) Chairman Nguyen The Doanh asserted that recent tensions between the government of Hanoi and the Catholic Church were property and not religious issues. Doanh insisted that land issues in general are "long and complicated" in Vietnam. He warned that the Catholics should not create "social disorder" over the Thai Ha and Nha Chung land disputes. The DCM responded that Catholic leaders say they have been going to the Hanoi City Government for a long time -- in some cases, as long as eight years -- to try to resolve land issues, but have received no response. Harsh language in the state-controlled press, particularly personal attacks on Archbishop Ngo Quang Kiet, has served to undermine efforts to resolve the disputes, the DCM emphasized.

¶3. (SBU) Doanh said the CRA is conducting training courses on religious regulations in Cao Bang, Dien Bien, Lao Cai and Tuyen Quang Provinces to improve local officials' understanding of religious regulations as well as religious leaders' knowledge of what the registration process entails. Doanh conceded that Protestant registration in the Northwest has been slower than in the Central Highlands because the "topography makes it more difficult" to reach certain areas. So far, CRA has registered about 110 congregations in the Northwest and, by the end of 2008, aims to have registered a total of 200 congregations, Doanh said. He agreed that local authorities in some areas are not implementing regulations as well as others and pointed out that CRA continually has to remind local leaders of proper procedures.

¶4. (SBU) The DCM pressed Doanh to speed up registration and to ensure that local authorities did not refuse to accept applications from all congregations seeking registration. She noted the case of Baptist Minister Nguyen Chi Huong, accused by authorities in Danang of being a "lawbreaker," but whose only crime was preaching without proper registration. The DCM noted that Vietnam's 2005 Law on Religious Freedom provided a reasonably transparent process for registration. Once they have applied, authorities must either register the church or provide specific legal reasons why it cannot be registered. According to the law, a church that has applied for formal recognition but is awaiting a final answer is allowed to operate essentially as if it were fully registered. A number of provinces subvert the intent of the law, the DCM noted, by simply refusing to accept registration applications from churches that do not enjoy local political favor. Doanh acknowledged uneven application of the law and promised to look into the matter.

15. (SBU) The CRA supports printing the Bible in the Hmong language, Doanh stressed, explaining that the issue is largely a technical one because the GVN has not yet recognized the "new" written Hmong language. The CRA does not have the authority to recognize new languages, he explained, so the issue must be taken up with the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Information. The DCM said the Ambassador would raise the issue with the Minister of Education and Training, but urged the CRA to push the process along.

MICHALAK